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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 001033

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PROG](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: FMLN, ARENA REBELS SEIZE ASSEMBLY LEADERSHIP

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 1011
[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 978

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On October 30, the (left-wing) Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) party teamed with 12 newly-independent former (conservative) National Republican Alliance (ARENA) legislative deputies to assume control of the Legislative Assembly's leadership positions. The agreement allows the incumbent National Conciliation Party (PCN) to retain the Assembly presidency for 15 months, after which the FMLN will preside for the remaining 15 months of the legislative term. The agreement suggests a burgeoning alliance between the FMLN and its erstwhile right-wing opponents, the ARENA 12 and the PCN. President Funes publicly chastised the FMLN's gamesmanship and suggested he is worried that the growing power of the FMLN could jeopardize his long-term policy goals. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) In May, at the onset of the current Assembly term, a coalition of right-wing parties) ARENA, the PCN and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC))- agreed to divide the Assembly's 11 leadership positions as follows: three seats to the FMLN, three to ARENA, three to the PCN (including the presidency), and two to the PDC. The FMLN opposed the agreement, claiming that it deserved the presidency because it controlled the largest bloc in the Assembly.

[1](#)3. (U) Since then, 12 of the 32 ARENA deputies broke ranks with the party, and now call themselves the Great Alliance for National Unity (Gran Alianza por la Unidad Nacional, GANA) (see reftels). Under the agreement ratified on October 30, the FMLN and PCN will rotate as Assembly president. The PCN's Ciro Cruz Zepeda (incumbent) will serve until February 2011, after which the FMLN's Sigfrido Reyes will serve until the end of the legislative term in April 2012. The agreement also expands the Assembly leadership from 11 to 13 seats. The agreement assigns the seats as follows: four to the FMLN, three to GANA (including one already occupied by Guillermo Gallegos, head of ARENA's legislative bloc in the previous Assembly), three to the PCN, two to ARENA, and one to the PDC.

[1](#)4. (U) The Assembly's president sets the agenda, appoints deputies to committees and designates special legislation review committees at his discretion. Other members of the Assembly's governing body control administrative functions. All members of the directive body earn higher salaries than their counterparts in the Assembly.

[1](#)5. (U) On October 30, President Funes publicly criticized the FMLN's back-room dealing for the Assembly presidency, calling it "a bad message" in which "special interests and personal ambition have taken a front seat to the national interest." He suggested that the rapid marginalization of ARENA worries him because "(his) government and democratic coexistence in general requires the existence of strong opposition parties."

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: While the FMLN's assumption of the Assembly

presidency in February 2011 represents a significant change, the big news here is the increasingly close cooperation between the ostensibly ideologically opposed FMLN and GANA. The FMLN now has two ideologically flexible, opportunistic allies in the legislature: the PCN and GANA. As long as it holds, this alliance of strange bedfellows gives the FMLN 57 votes (of 84), enough to pass any piece of legislation or constitutional amendment. In the short run, this should help President Funes win passage of his budget. However, Funes is rightly worried that with ARENA fractured and marginalized, the Assembly will be unable to help him check the FMLN's excesses. End comment.

BRADY